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IF I WERE GOD

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE



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IF I WERE GOD

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IF I WERE GOD:

A CONVERSATION.

BY

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

"Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde ;
Hae mercy o' my soul, Lord God ;
As I wad do, were I Lord God,
And ye were Martin Elginbrodde"
George Macdonald

London

JAMES BOWDEN

10, HENRIETTA STREET,
COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

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TO SISTER LILY

26 May 53 of Foundation Turner

IF I WERE GOD.

ON a still summit of the Alps one August afternoon a young man and a young woman talked of God—sun, snow, and peace, making a shining silence of many colours about them. The strong sun, the pure snow, the vast and tender peace. As the woman talked, these great presences were unconsciously filling her mind, as visible attributes of the God whom her companion had challenged her to defend that afternoon.

*A man and
a woman
talk of God.*

Both of the talkers had felt

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the hand of God in their lives, mysteriously (wantonly, said the man), chastening, but only the woman still saw His face. The blow that had driven the man away from God, broken-hearted and blasphemous, had by some spiritual instinct, unaccountably illogical, drawn the woman nearer to His side.

“ Might sorrow, after all, purify ? ” he asked himself, as he watched her pure and strangely happy face.

*“ Might
sorrow, after
all, purify ? ”*

Once he had been in no doubt about the answer to that question ; for to a facile optimism born of his own personal peace (so he now would say) the purification by

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pain had been a suspiciously easy reconciliation of the Love of God with the eternal martyrdom of man. He had fluted beautifully of pain as the necessary process of all growth, forgetting in his eloquence to ask—why so cruel a condition should have been attached to man's involuntary existence.

Had it not been as easy to an omnipotent love to make growth the child of pleasure instead?

In those days a friend more acquainted with grief had asked him—"was it really true that sorrow always, or even often, purified

*Does not
sorrow
debase ?*

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—did it not more often debase ? ” But our theoriser upon sorrow had as yet known it only in books—and in the experiences of his dearest friends,—so it had not really touched him with the touch of reality.

When his own time came, what a poor pretty thing out in the storm his dainty philosophy had seemed. It was rather the philosophy that sought refuge with the philosopher, than afforded it to him. And yet perhaps

*A philo-
sophy born
before,
instead of
after,
experience.*

it was not so much the philosophy that had been wrong. Was it not rather that it had been for-

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mulated too early — before
experience, instead of after
it? The faith that sustains
must be wrung out of the
moment of the soul's need.
For each agony its own peace.
We can no more anticipate
the shock of sorrow than we
can the onset of a foe we
have never seen. In vain we
train ourselves in sham spiritual
combats, in vain perfect our
skill with the weapons we
know — sorrow always
fights with a strange
weapon, and the strategy
of her attack is ever new.

*Sorrow
always fights
with a
strange
weapon.*

As the days wore on, and
his grief took ever new and
newer forms—for nothing is

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so chameleon-coloured as grief—there were moments when some sudden insight into the truth about himself, some hint of a purpose in it all, some ray of a compensation, would bring his castaway philosophy knocking gently at the door of his soul. But they were moments angrily forgotten—for in every grief, in addition to the real sorrow, there is a certain wilfulness of sorrow—

*Concerning
sorrow.*

the Rachel-half of sorrow that *will* not be comforted. Nor would it be wilfulness merely, but also that loyalty of sorrow, which will admit no justification—for *the other*. For us maybe

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—but what of *them*? Are we complacently to accept their loss as our gain? Shall they be sown in sorrow that we shall reap in gladness? And then the voice would whisper again—*Is it their loss*? May not their loss of us mystically fashion and refine them, as perhaps our loss of them was meant to fashion and refine us? Ah! in that whisper who shall say which is most—our longing for their

"I am tired of being unhappy." happiness, or for our own? Is it merely our

selfishness that cries to itself, "I am tired of being unhappy"?

So must the soul of sorrow torture itself. The simple

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sorrow of a simple nature, in which no ray of sunlight enters, may become a luxury, so strangely does pain transform itself into pleasure ; but the complex sorrow of a complex nature, a sorrow that, so to say, retains its capacity for happiness, and in which pain and pleasure dwell together, ever true to itself, and yet seemingly often false—of the two such sorrow is surely the more torturing tragic thing.

As the man and the woman talked together that August afternoon, the old philosophy had come very appealingly to the door of the man's heart, and the more had he knitted his brows to drive it away.

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“If we admit the beauty of the product—the process remains none the less

*The beautiful product
—the hideous process.*

hideous,” he exclaimed, “none the less incompatible with your just and loving God. No! I only wish I *could* forgive God. . . .”

A little “hush” was on her lips. She knew from his voice that he meant no irreverence—it sounded strange rather than irreverent—curiously ignorant rather than profane. If she could only make him see! And yet it was all so simple, so clear. She had an impulse of almost humorous impatience. “Look there,” she might almost

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have said. “ See ! in a direct line from here—surely you can see the sun ! ” To her it was all so humanly near, and yet so divine.

And the man was conscious of a strange new desire—
*A new desire
—really to
see.* really to see ; though he sat by her side and listened, as a blind man might sit and hear one tell of a wonderful light. Yes ! it must be something worth seeing that made her face look like that.

He knew the look of old, though he had seldom seen it so bright on any face. More or less it was to be seen on the faces of all her friends, in

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whose company he had found
himself these last few
*The "Early
Christian"
look.* days. He called it,
half playfully, "the *Early
Christian* look." That was
the true light "that never
was on sea or land."

At his hotel he had fallen
in with a merry little company
of Christians. You might
mistakenly call it a common
experience, but apart from the
fact that Christians of the kind
I mean are rare, rare as the
true followers of any mystical
revelation must ever be in
this vulgar world ; the experi-
ence was doubly uncommon

*A merry little
company of
Christians.* to our young philoso-
pher, as for some years

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he had lived among an entirely alien people ; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that these Christians, with their curiously lit faces, their strange other-worldly speech, their odd little tendernesses and gentle humour, were as novel to him as the little bands of their spiritual forefathers had seemed to the philosopher in Rome and Athens. But it was the strangeness of a long discontinued familiarity, and thus the more strange. For his boyhood had been passed among just this same strange people, and is not association two-thirds of affection ?

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How curious to think that they were still going on in the same way as when he was a boy — dreaming the same dreams and telling them to each other in the same sweet, yes sweet, old words ! Suddenly at a meal there had been bowed heads over the table, and a quiet voice speaking as to one who is only seen with closed eyes.

“Fancy ! they are still going on praying !” And

*“ They are
still going
on pray-
ing ! ”*

something between a smile and a tear asked his heart “if perhaps, after all; he should some day come to pray again—pray as (the tears sprang to his eyes

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as he thought of it) once a little boy, he prayed kneeling at the great chair, while his father bent tenderly over him, talking strangely to God, with a voice so real (so evidently near to His presence) that one felt God couldn't be further away than the ceiling—but felt too good to look.

Yes! there were people in the world who still went on praying, in spite of a literary criticism that had long since relegated God and His saints to the museums of mythology,

*In spite of
science!*

in spite of a scientific criticism that had proved their cosmogony a child's dream of a world—unconquer-

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able idealists whom no theories of the dust might dismay.

Accustomed so long to bring all experience to the test of the senses and the everyday reason, it was strange to mark them, in all their speech, in their simplest acts, implying an invisible reality, a transcendental responsibility. Could it be possible that they had not heard !—not heard that this faith of theirs was all a dream, a beautiful dream faded and fled at the daybreak of science ?

O yes ! they had heard all that — and they smiled to themselves sweetly, indulgently, a little sor-

The Christian smile.

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rowfully, a little humorously, as they thought of it. You see — they *knew*. By some grace of God, of nature if you will—but still of God,—it had been given them to see. It was but natural that those who had not seen should deny the Vision, but the Vision was none the less real for that. Prayer not real—not heard—not answered ! Come, will you listen to a story ! Listen—this happened to me ! to me, actually to me ! It is no fancy—I know it, and this friend here will tell you the like of herself, and yonder friend there has been wonderfully blest of God in prayer !

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Sweet old fairy-tales of
faith! how fascinating they
were — how real they
*The fairy-
tales of
faith.* sounded! It was like
listening to the actual
ghost-stories of some friend
whose word one could not
doubt—and yet . . . Suppose
too they should after all be
true? *Could* they be true?

Intellectual criticism was
clearly irrelevant, impertinent
here — irrelevant and
*What if
they were
true?* impertinent, he told
himself, as intellectual
criticism would be of those
apprehensions of beauty which
had long been for him the sole
revelations of the Divine.
Indeed, was it, after all, a

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difference of eyesight again? Should he cease to believe in the mystery of beauty, because it was hidden from other eyes? Perhaps they apprehended God in some such way as he apprehended Beauty.

*The Belief
in Beauty
and the
Belief in
God.*

He the believer in Beauty, she the believer in God—he had called himself and his companion.

Could he believe in beauty and not believe in God? she had asked simply, as they gazed over the beautiful summits of the world.

“Do we really accept that principle in the world of men and women?” he had retorted. “Does belief in beauty

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necessarily mean belief in our beautiful friends? Do beautiful faces and beautiful deeds *always* go together?"

"Besides," he had added with a smile, "is that quite the kind of argument for a good Christian to use—the argument from beauty to goodness, from the beauty of the world to the goodness of God? Is there not much goodness that is somewhat

*Plainness
becoming
to the
Christian.*

painfully independent of beauty? and is not the good Christian all the better for being a little plain?"

"The Christian," she answered gravely, "has some-

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times found it necessary to do battle with beauty, and may need to do so again ; but the Christian after knowledge—for of course you must have realised that there are Christians after knowledge, those who know why they are Christians, and Christians by obedience, sturdy and meek obeyers of a law which they little understand — the Christian after knowledge will always fight beauty with a sad heart.”

*The Chris-
tian and
Beauty.*

“ You see,” she continued, “ every spiritual good has its spiritual danger. Even goodness itself develops vices of its own, harshness and narrowness

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of the soul, as beauty on the other hand leads to the soul's softness and laxity. Beauty is but one of the angels of God, and to worship her as though she were God Himself is to degrade and derange her by false honours, as it is to sensualise the worshipper by a one-sided worship. But Beauty *is* an angel, and as such is a messenger of God, though on the way from man to God she may have forgotten her message, grown deliriously arrogant by the incense from earthly altars.

“There is the danger of your modern religion of beauty — you worship the

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messenger and neglect the message."

The message of Beauty is the goodness of God.

"What message has Beauty beyond the message of her own beauty?" asked the man.

"The message of Beauty is the goodness of God," she replied.

"You have said interesting things," he had answered, "but you have hardly proved that! You have said the world is beautiful, therefore God is good. Well, then, suppose we put your position into a formula, and say that God is as good as the world is beautiful. Then we must ask how beautiful is

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the world—and how ugly ?

*How
beautiful is
the world—
and how
ugly !*

Behind the green mask
of the spring, is there
not a lonely monster
gnashing his teeth, with
beauty for his snare ; and all
this green so delightful to our
eyes, what is it but the vivid
green of a gigantic grave,
the plague-pit into which
humanity has been thrown
century after century ? The
green world ! Yes ! the
beautiful green grave of
humanity, kept tidy by the
sexton sun, and prettily set
out with those tall daisies we
call the stars.”

“ You are sad,” she answered gently, “ your soul is very sick.”

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“Who would not be soul-sick when he thinks on all the sorrow of the world—the green world!”

“Yes! that is a good spirit—but it is a goodness too wild. God knows the sorrow of His world, and He smiles when we help Him to bear it; but He would not have any of us try to take it all on our own narrow human shoulders. When we forget that He is bearing it too we are forgetting Him. Besides, God knows the meaning of the sorrow, and therefore He smiles, and His smile is beauty. Sad graves grow green, you say,—but

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that again is a mystic hint
of God's purpose. If we

*If we knew
why graves
grow green.*

knew why graves grow
green, we should know
the beautiful meaning of
death—and we are not left
quite without sustaining
glimpses of what that mean-
ing may be.”

“ Words ! words ! What
can be the meaning, what
the excuse for so hideous a
thing as death, and all the
dark and cruel ways of
disease ? ”

“ We are too near it all
to know. But there is a
meaning, be sure, a lovely
meaning.”

“ You really believe that ? ”

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“ Yes, firmly—without a fear.”

A lovely meaning to death ! “ A lovely meaning ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ A lovely meaning to a story like this?—A month or so ago I was staying at a friend’s house in one of the greenest corners of the world. It was spring too, spring at its loveliest. If ever earth had a heavenly meaning it seemed to speak it in that valley, speak it all day long in every tenderness of sound and colour. The sky leaned over that little valley full of love. How kind the sun ! how soft the

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stars ! The very ground
breathed gentleness, pushing
*The green
mask of the
spring.* out myriads of little
green hands, frond and
blade and shoot, close pressed
side by side in exquisite mul-
titudes, as though to show
how kind a heart was beating
underneath. Sometimes the
sense of urgent young life was
such, that one could almost
fancy the green hill heaved
like the bosom of a sleeping
woman, and one trod dain-
tily lest one marred any
little leaf of her wonderful
robe. Indeed the world
seemed too exquisite to tread
upon.

“ Had you been there, dear

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friend, you would have said, as you said to-day—‘Can you doubt God’s goodness, when you look on so beautiful a world?’ And I should have answered, ‘Indeed, I cannot doubt it here!’

“But then, listen how the green veil of beauty was suddenly rent across in that little valley, and we of that household saw the face of the monster looking out at us from the back of the world.

*The monster
at the back
of the world.*

“In that household was a little maidservant, about eighteen years old, neat and sweet and blithe as a bird, pretty and innocent and

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merry, a child just beginning to dream the dream of a woman. The lads worshipped her, and her young heart was as full of the promise of life as a young heart can hold. She had never had so much as a headache in her life, and toothache was probably the saddest thing that had so far befallen her. Well, quite suddenly, one heavenly morning, one of her feet began to pain her. It grew worse, so that she was obliged to go to bed.

“We thought it a sprain, or the damp, till the other began. The doctor came

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and looked at them. They were curiously livid, and deathly cold — and this is what he had to tell my friend : that in this torture-

This torture-house of the world.

house of the world, there is a device of disease so fiendish that you may go running on glad springing feet all your youth, eagerly chasing the hours, till unexpectedly some day, perhaps the loveliest day of the year, the loveliest day of your life, you will suddenly feel a strange cold scythe at your feet ; like that little maidservant, you will go to bed, your feet will grow colder, and perhaps—if God

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is good !—you will die ; but if not, when you rise from your bed some months after, you will feel something new and frightful about yourself—God help you !—your feet are gone !

“ So was it to be with that poor, poor little girl. The monster had looked out from his green hill — and snapped.”

There was silence for a moment as he ceased, his face pale and excited. Then he said—

“ Tell me, friend, what is the lovely meaning of that ? ”

What is the lovely meaning of that ?

“ Yes ! it is terrible—ter-

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rible," she answered slowly, with an inward anguish in her voice, and the light in her face seemed to waver and darken for a moment—"terrible, and no wise Christian would be silly enough to try to tell you its meaning. Only I know it has a meaning—yes, I dare believe, a lovely meaning. But, oh yes, yes, it is terrible." And something in her voice seemed to say that she was thinking not only of that story she had just listened to, but of all the crowded agony of human life.

Indeed, her thoughts had suddenly traversed the blue

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and radiant distance, and dropped down far behind the dreamy border of the world into a very different region, a region of foul air and narrow evil streets, where men and women had no thought of such sunny summits as that on which she sat talking in the sweet air. Her thoughts passed in and out of the houses, and familiar faces greeted her, worn with sorrow and stained with crime. She made an involuntary movement as though she must hasten back to this world of her thought, as though it needed her care. If the

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little candle burning for God
*A little candle burn-
ing for God.* in those dark streets
should fail, or be blown
out, while she laughed among
the hills !

Yes, the Lover of Beauty
was right. The world was
very dark and very ugly
too—who could dream how
dark and ugly, as one gazed
down those green slopes
away to the happy white
villages. Looking out from
heaven, the earth might in-
deed seem blest. Perhaps
*Perhaps God
only sees the
world at an
enchanted
distance.* God only saw the world
like this from on high,
saw nothing of the
bleeding scars, heard nothing
of the woe. Nay, but God's

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Son had seen and suffered it all. Had He not walked by her side day and night through those foul streets, and in the light of His face had she not read the meaning of the darkness.

“Yes ; it is terrible,” she repeated, coming out of her reverie, “and when I first saw it all I thought like you. But as I came nearer to it, saw it oftener, *knew* it better ; looking beneath the awful face . . . somehow I cannot

*Those who
know sorrow
grow to love
her.*

explain how, though my pity grew deeper, my faith also grew more and more, and my fear grew less. Sorrow is so strange

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a thing—shall we expect to learn its meaning in one terrified look that looks no more? Some who have lived with sorrow have grown to love her strangely. Even you, I can see it in your face, are half in love with sorrow yourself. If one's own sorrows grow so dear, may not the sorrows of others wear crowns we do not see? Though you may say that in one sense the sorrows of our fellows are shadows to us, in another sense it is no less true that they seem more awful than our own. We know our own, those of others frighten us the more because they are untried. A

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terrible thing is never so terrible when it has happened to ourselves."

"How strange it is !" said the man presently, half to himself, but looking at her in a sort of admiring perplexity.

"What is strange ? "

"Strange that *you*, a woman so gentle, so wise, so full of love—should wish to defend such a being—such a . . ."

The little "hush" was on her lips once more.

"You know," he continued, "that if you, if *I* were God, we could not even conceive so cruel an agony for a creature

*If I were
God !*

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of our making as your *God* has decreed for that innocent little girl? ”

“ Without the powers of God,” was her answer, “ we

*Without the
powers of
God, we are
no proper
critics of His
purposes.*

are no proper critics of His purposes. And if it seems strange to you that I should praise Him, how much stranger is it that you should question Him ! For the very power even to mock God comes from God Himself.”

“ Would you still feel like this of God whatever should happen to you ? ”

“ So I trust—for I can conceive no calamity so terrible as to lose my faith in

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God. Without that I should die."

"For you have suffered?"

"Yes, I have suffered."

"And God has consoled you?"

"Yes!"

"Did you never think that it was God who first made you suffer?"

"Yes!—that was a part of the consolation."

"Forgive me, but again I say—How strange!"

.

Then a long silence fell on the two. Far away across his palace floors the sun was preparing to leave the world, in a great pomp of parting,

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and the world seemed to stand still to watch him go. More immeasurable grew the depths of space, and with it the senses of the two watchers seemed to gain a power of infinite expansion and comprehensiveness, as though there was room in their souls for still mightier solitudes, heights and deeps more profound, splendours more noble,

*The world
less wonder-
ful than the
soul of man.*

than these. How vast a world, yet a little eye could hold it all ! How wonderful, yet not so wonderful as the soul of man !

Presently the woman spoke again.

“ I have been thinking,”

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she said, "if there is any way by which I can tell you just something of what my love for God is like. It seems impossible to put into words. But I have thought of an image which indeed is small by comparison, and which perhaps I should not use—but which you, I think, will not misunderstand. You, who love beauty, will know how poor often is the material symbol by which alone we can express a beautiful thought."

The man assented, and she went on, gazing sadly into the sunset.

"You must have known

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what it is to have some friend
whom you dearly loved
The Love —some friend, too,
Terrestrial. quite unlike yourself, with
different gifts and different
dreams, perhaps with a dif-
ferent religion—perhaps with
none. Perhaps there was
much in this friend that you
couldn't understand, much
you regretted, much even that
you feared, something even
that you hated. Maybe that
friend has often been unkind,
cruel, even mean—perhaps
has sinned in ways you could
not comprehend ; perhaps
even has seemed at times
foully in the wrong. It may
even have happened that he

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has outraged your most sacred ideals, and trampled underfoot the very love you brought him—and yet, you know not how, nor why, you have never for one moment ceased to love him, never for a moment doubted that your real friend, beneath those accidents of character and circumstance, was good and noble and wonderful in spite of all. Nothing he could do to all eternity could alter that. There was some saving virtue even in his bad actions which made them better than the good actions of others. Have you ever loved a friend like that ? ”

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“Yes ! I once loved a woman like that,” replied the man.

The woman’s face grew wistful a moment, as though with a memory, and presently she continued—

“ Well, the love of the soul for God is something like that.

*The Love
Celestial.*

You cannot explain it to another, you can give no reason why or how it came, why or how it stays. One day you found it, an awful blessedness in your soul, and you knew that while you lived it must remain for you the holiest thing in life. The love for God is a love which asks no questions, and

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though there may be much it cannot explain, much maybe that seems dark and strange to the understanding, its faith remains unshaken. When the soul has once known and loved God, it may tremble at His decrees, may even grow sick at heart sometimes with perplexity, seeing the evil God suffers to prosper in the world, and the hard, even cruel, processes of goodness—but it can never lose its faith. If you have once seen the love in God's eyes, you can never fear for the world."

*The love in
God's eyes.*

"It is dangerous argument you are using," presently an-

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swered the man, "and put in another way you might hesitate to accept it. For is it not really the old excuse of power made so often for the demi-god, applied by you to God himself—made also for Beauty and Love, two of

*The excuse
of power.*

the most potent forms of power. In all strong actions—good or bad as we are accustomed to distinguish them—is there not a virtue in their mere strength which makes the average standards of right and wrong inapplicable? Besides, perhaps even in the narrow sense of right and wrong, strength never does wrong in the long run.

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Many a so-called good act has become a bad one in the course of a generation, whereas some so-called bad acts, because they were strong, have borne good fruit for centuries. To be the moralist on the great scale, you must often seem the immoralist on the small. This, of course, is a commonplace with some thinkers, but I confess to surprise at finding it used by a Christian, for the Christian as a rule insists on the immediate colour of our actions, which he labels black or white as soon as committed, and makes no allowance for individual temperament, force of

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circumstances, or a possible result neither black nor white."

"Christianity is changing," she answered; "not in its essence, but in its *Christianity is changing.* forms. Its heart is as good as ever, but its head is better. It understands humanity better, or perhaps I should say humanity understands *it* better. So I shall be bold, and say 'Yes' to what you have said. It was something like that which I meant—though I think you are only half-right *Bad power.* about power. I think there is such an element in the universe as *bad power*—

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but I think the coming Christianity will be more wisely-seeing than the past in this, that it will oftener recognise that bad power in so-called good men and good actions. It will judge rather a man's self than his actions, will separate men and women into good and bad *natures*, rather than into the well or the ill-behaved. It will judge men and women by a subtler test of the spirit than can be applied to mere surface actions, and it will become more as Christ meant it to be, a religion of love, a vast brotherhood of the loving and the lovable."

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“ You mean, then, that this love of God is a mystical revelation for which no mere effort of the reason will avail.”

Reason a blind guide.

“ Would reason avail to win that other revelation to which, perhaps wrongly, I have compared a love so transcendently greater ? ”

“ Will *any* effort avail to win this revelation ? ”

“ Only what I might call an effort of the heart, an attitude of humble expectancy, a sort of listening of the soul.

Intellect blind to more than it sees. Intellect is blind to more in life than it sees. The heart and even the senses — when sanely

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ordered—are a surer guide. Our simplest thoughts are our truest, our simplest impulses are our best—or our worst.

“You, I know, have sometimes the impulse to throw yourself on your knees to pray, but a hundred superior thoughts spring up and shame the impulse. You say to yourself that it is the force of old association, and not a real desire of your nature ; or you compromise and say that you can pray just as well in your

*The will
to pray.*

morning walks, or listening to music. So perhaps you can, if you will really *pray* ; but even in

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those moments you will find that at the bottom of your mind there is some last pride of your reason that has not kneeled.

“Till the whole nature kneels there is no prayer. The heart cannot open its doors to the love of God so long as there is one thought within that would keep them shut. God’s love is always shining. Let the heart open its doors ever so little, and in a moment it will be flooded with light and a wonderful singing.”

*A heart
born blind.* “But what if the heart is
born blind, so to say?”
asked the man.

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“I do not believe that hearts are ever born blind, but if they are, this again is one of God’s mysteries.”

“God’s mysteries ! so you would explain all the evil in the world. Is it not too easy an explanation of so many hard things? ”

“No, it is sometimes very hard ; but you must remember that the mysteries are the mysteries of a love we have learnt to trust. And I should have thought that even one who saw life as you do, would have seen in it also much that

clearly bears witness to the love of God for the world. For if all we

*Man the
ungracious
critic of
God.*

IF I WERE GOD

are and have comes from God, surely we owe Him something more than criticism of that in life which we cannot understand, owe Him some return of gratitude for the many joys and wonders of existence—for the revelation of beauty, for instance.”

“I wonder,” pondered the man—“it is true there is much in life that is sweet, but it is tangled so cunningly with so much that is terrible, that one almost trembles to seize a joy lest it should turn into a serpent, to take a loved hand lest it should moulder to ashes in our grasp.

“Yes ! life is a wonderful

IF I WERE GOD

banquet—but the dishes are
all poisoned.”

*Life a
wonderful
banquet—
but the
dishes all
poisoned.*

“Ah ! how wrong
you are ! Why should

you take the evil of life as
pointing the moral of the
world ? Why not the good ?”

“Because death is longer
and stronger than life—and

*Evil stronger
than good.*

because, so far as I can
see, the forces of evil in
the world are stronger than the
forces of good.”

“Death,” she answered, “is
only life hiding his face awhile,
to reveal it lovelier in another
world ; and I believe, too, that
the forces of evil are only the
armies of God in disguise.
Yet, if you should be right,

IF I WERE GOD

and the evil really be stronger than the good—is there not all the more reason for you to be on God's side? . .

“Yes!” she added presently, as they rose and began to move down the hill homewards, “I shall some day meet you there.”

The man made no answer, but in his heart he said, “If I were God, I would create more women like you, that men might believe in me.”

Soon he returned once more to his own people, the lovers of Beauty; but they were no longer quite the same for him. He seemed to have learnt some meanings that were

*The lovers
of Beauty.*

IF I WERE GOD

hidden from them, though he could hardly say what. Somehow they did not seem to understand even beauty.

And often he would hear a clear sweet voice speaking from a mount of blue air :
“ You worship the messenger and neglect the message. . . .
The message of beauty is the goodness of God ” —
though he did not forget to remind himself that that message also had a messenger.

Sometimes he found himself wishing to be back once more among those gentle, humorous people, with the kind ways and the happy

IF I WERE GOD

lighted faces. Sometimes he
craved to hear again those
quaint childlike turns of
phrase, to listen to their
Sometimes strange little stories of
he—almost—
prayed. answered prayers, to
heal his heart with their
wise simplicity. Sometimes
he—almost—prayed.

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